

# Documents on Diplomacy: Lessons

## "Mr. Secretary, Mr. Secretary; Are You Threatening Europe?"

### A Press Conference with John Quincy Adams

Standard: II. Time, Continuity, and Change  
VI. Power, Authority, and Governance  
IX. Global Connections  
X. Civic Ideals and Practices

Grade Level: 9–12

Objectives: The student will:

- Explore reasons for the Monroe Doctrine
- Examine the beliefs of John Quincy Adams
- Analyze U.S. foreign policy in the 1820s
- Simulate a press conference

Time: 1–2 class periods

Materials: Documents: **1821** *No Search for Monsters to Destroy*  
**1823** *Account of a Cabinet Meeting*  
**1823** *The Monroe Doctrine*

Exercises: *From the Press: Questions for John Quincy Adams*

Procedures:

#### *Setting the Stage*

John Quincy Adams was Secretary of State in the Monroe Administration (1817–1825). Adams is given credit for much of the writing of the seventh annual speech to Congress delivered by James Monroe on December 2, 1823, in which the "Monroe Doctrine" was included. This acknowledgement, however, is not often referenced in U.S. History survey texts. In addition, the statement by the President was not immediately referred to as the "Monroe Doctrine," therefore the press activity in this lesson will not refer to the message by that title. The press conference is a modern creation, but students are asked to step back in time to use this mode of communication.

1. Divide class into five groups of 4–5 students.
2. Select one group to collectively portray John Quincy Adams.
3. Assign the remainder of the class to 4 additional groups collectively representing these newspapers:

- a. *Gazette of the United States & Daily Advertiser* (Philadelphia)
- b. *New York Sun*
- c. *Connecticut Herald*
- d. *Boston Daily Advertiser*

4. Provide a short biography of John Quincy Adams for background information.

<http://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/people/adams-john-quincy>

5. Distribute these documents to students:

- **1821** *No Search for Monsters to Destroy*
- **1823** *Account of a Cabinet Meeting*
- **1823** *The Monroe Doctrine*

6. Allow time for students to read the documents using the following questions as a guide.

- a. How does John Quincy Adams portray the United States in *No Search for Monsters to Destroy*?
- b. What was the occasion on which Adams delivered this message?
- c. Identify the Cabinet members included in the meeting Adams describes in *Account of a Cabinet Meeting*.
- d. Who is George Canning and what is his proposal?
- e. The Holy Alliance was formed in 1815 by Russia, Austria, and Prussia after the final defeat of Napoleon. What concerns were expressed at the Cabinet meeting about the Alliance? What difference of opinion was expressed by Calhoun and Adams?
- f. Did Adams favor a unilateral or bilateral approach to Russia and the other Allies? Explain.
- g. In the Monroe Doctrine, Monroe (and Adams) referred to two spheres of influence (an area in which a foreign power exerts political or economic influence). Explain why the Americas and Europe were included as these spheres of influence.
- h. Why was Russia singled out in the speech?
- i. Describe the references to non-colonization and non-intervention.
- j. Does this speech reflect the sentiments expressed by Adams in *No Search for Monsters to Destroy*?

7. Discuss the information gathered from the documents.

8. Provide all groups with the list of questions to ask the Secretary of State. (Note: These questions could be distributed in advance, prior to class, to give the Adams' group, in particular, time to study all relevant information. Also, students representing the newspapers could develop additional questions if given prep time outside of class.)

9. Set up the press conference. Have students portraying John Quincy Adams move to the front of the classroom. These students may answer

separately, alternating responses, or be allowed to collectively confer before answering. They should stand during the press conference. A podium could be provided.

**10.** The press groups may sit together as indicated by the names of their newspapers. When they address the Secretary, each should stand. The same instructions apply for these groups—they may ask questions separately, alternating questions, or be allowed to confer if considering follow-up questions or new questions. The reporters should refer to Mr. Adams as “Mr. Secretary.” They should raise their hands and shout “Mr. Secretary, Mr. Secretary”. . .until called on by the Secretary. However, they should remain restrained while another reporter and the Secretary are speaking.

**11.** The teacher may divide the questions among the press corps—five per group in advance of the activity. This would provide students with the opportunity to collect more information within a shorter time span.

**12.** If the teacher prefers the element of surprise, cut the questions into 20 slips of paper, fold, and have reporters draw questions just prior to the press conference. It is at the teacher’s discretion whether to provide the questions to the John Quincy Adams’ group prior to or just before the press conference. ■